OBERLIN AND NEFF

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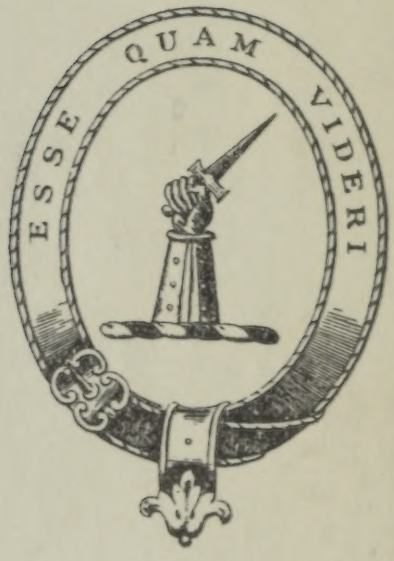

Robert Washington Oates

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THE

MOUNTAIN PASTORS;

OR,

MEMOIRS

OF

OBERLIN AND NEFF.

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PREFACE.

THE Life of the good Pastor Oberlin has already been written in several forms; but it still seemed as if something were wanted to bring it into common view. The published octavo Memoir is too long and too expensive for circulation in the class to which the Christian Tract Society has hitherto directed its attention; and thinking it, as the Committee honestly do, likely to excite a strong and useful interest, they have therefore undertaken to prepare and publish the present epitome of the chief particulars of the life of the excellent Pastor.

In arranging the materials for this, the Editor felt a strong desire to include a short notice of another excellent Mountain Pastor, who, though his work cannot be compared with that of Oberlin, (the one ministry having extended over a period of *sixty* years, and the other of little more than *three*,) possessed in large measure the same spirit, and is well worthy of being associated in our memories with the benefactor of the Steinthal. In the characters of Oberlin and Neff there was a considerable difference, as well as in the degree in which these two men were favoured by early education; but the Christian world has learnt to look upon them together, as labourers in the same vineyard, possessed by the same spirit; and now, in contemplating calmly the purpose of their hearts and lives, and the unshrinking earnestness with which they pursued it, we follow them in thought to the foot of that Eternal Throne, where all good servants receive the reward of faith and hope, and feel it good that they *should* be thus united.

If, in the life of Oberlin, we see exemplified the value of a lengthened course of well-doing, it is encouraging to find in that of Felix Neff the fruits of a brief but energetic career.—We shall see cause to find some fault with each of these excellent men—but that is easy. Alas! how far more difficult to transfer to ourselves the holiness, the purity, the deep devotion, the self-denial for the sake of their fellow-creatures, which signalized them! Here, however, they are before us; and before us, too, is the fountain of living waters at which they drank. May it be to us, as to them, "a spring of water, springing up unto everlasting life"!

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LIFE OF OBERLIN.

THE LIFE

OF

JOHN FREDERIC OBERLIN,

PASTOR OF THE STEINTHAL.

THERE is a mountainous district in the north-east of France cut off by a very deep valley from a chain of high mountains, which are known by the name of the Vosges. The district in question is called sometimes the Haut Champ, (in English, *high field*,) and sometimes Champ de Feu, (field of fire,) which latter name implies, as is the case, that traces of volcanoes are to be met with in traversing it. The highest part of the mountain ridge is higher than Snowdon, in North Wales, but villages are scattered in various parts and at various heights; and valleys, some cultivated and rich, some more sterile, intersect it. Part of this district is called the Ban de la Roche, or the Steinthal—literally, Valley of Stone; and it forms one large parish, in

which are five villages or hamlets, and three churches, the duties of which are generally performed in turn by one pastor. The climate, in different parts of this district, and even parish, differs according to the height of the point at which you rest. Towards the summit of the mountain ridge it is as cold as at St. Petersburgh, while lower down it may be warmer than in England. The winter begins in September, and snow generally remains on the ground till May or June in the upper hamlets, where the harvest, of course, is later than in the lower.

The people of the Ban de la Roche, or Steinthal, being, at the time when our narrative commences, almost without roads, had little or no communication with the neighbouring country: they lived secluded among their own mountains and valleys, and had a language and manners and habits of their own, many of which were repulsive and selfish, unfitting them for the performance of the duties which men owe to men, and bringing them down very nearly to the level of the brutes. They did not speak such French as could be understood by those who lived a few miles from their mountains,—but a peculiar country language, in which no books could be written, in which no strangers could communicate with them. They professed to be Protestants, but could give very little account of their faith. They had schools, too; but of what sort they were, may appear from the following dialogue between a newly-arrived clergyman and the

principal schoolmaster, a withered old man, who was found lying doubled up on a little bed in the corner of his school-room, surrounded by riotous children :—

"Are you the Schoolmaster, my good friend?"

"Yes, Sir."

"And what do you teach the children?"

"Nothing, Sir."

"Nothing! how is that?"

"Because, Sir, I know nothing myself."

"Why, then, were you made Schoolmaster?"

"Why, Sir, I had been taking care of the Waldbach pigs for a great many years, and when I got too old and infirm for that employment, they sent me here to take care of the children."

There were other schools, but in none was there any great superiority to this: the children were herded together, like so many pigs or sheep, but taught little or nothing. To bring such a people as this into order, it may well be supposed, would be more than the work of a life; and Providence, in committing the inhabitants of the Ban de la Roche to the care of two successive Pastors of unwearied diligence, of sound Christian belief, and of corresponding practice, bestowed means of improvement upon this neglected district fully equal to its wants.

It is proposed, in this Tract, to give a sketch of the life and labours of the last of these Pastors, JOHN FREDERIC OBERLIN: but, in justice to the memory of the one who preceded him,

it must be allowed that *his* part was the most difficult of the two; and that, though not permitted, like Oberlin, to see the fruits of his ministry, he prepared the way, and aided his successor by his counsels and experience.

The name of this first friend of the Ban de la Roche was STOUBER. He succeeded in establishing improved schools; he gradually introduced the Scriptures; his preaching was fervent, scriptural, and plain. He lived seventeen years among the people, and left them, to their extreme regret, at the end of that time, for the city of Strasburg, but not without using his utmost endeavours to provide them a substitute, in which he was indeed truly successful.

Oberlin, then a young clergyman just twenty-seven years of age, was studying at Strasburg, with a view to a military chaplaincy, when Mr. Stouber called upon him, and proposed that he should undertake the pastoral care of the Ban de la Roche. The emolument was small, and the situation inviting to no one but to a person who preferred doing good to his fellow-creatures to any other employment; but Oberlin had already given very decisive proofs of piety and of earnest devotion to his Master's service; and Mr. Stouber was not wrong in his persuasion that he also possessed the kind of talent, the perseverance, and the firmness, which would be most requisite in the civilization of a half-barbarous people. The young minister willingly agreed to accept

the charge, provided no more fitting or elder candidate were found; and, none appearing, he was regularly appointed curate of the district, and introduced by Mr. Stouber to his flock on the 30th of March, 1767.

The new Pastor had possessed many early advantages, and improved them well. His father, a man of ability and information, held a respectable situation in Strasburg, and educated his nine children with the greatest care and affection. In this he was well aided by his wife, a most tender, devoted mother, who won her children to the love of goodness by the charm of example. These good parents seem to have been repaid for their pains by the after eminence of two, at least, among their sons,—one, the elder brother of Pastor Oberlin, becoming celebrated as a scholar and learned antiquary; the other, known, as we shall see, by a still more enduring claim upon the grateful remembrance of his fellow-creatures.

Young Oberlin was of a fervent, generous disposition, and signalized himself very early by his hatred of any instances of oppression or injustice which might come in his way. He was very quick in his feelings, and seems early to have been awakened to a lively sense of the mercies of God, and his claims on the hearts of his children. This is testified by a document in his handwriting, written at the age of twenty, in which he solemnly dedicates himself to the

service of his Maker, and petitions for support, concluding in these touching words :

"And when I am gone to the grave, should these pages fall into the hands of the friends I leave behind, may their hearts be moved by them. Grant them grace, not merely to read them as *mine*, but to feel in their own hearts what they express. Teach them to fear the Lord my God, to take refuge with me under the shadow of His wings, through time and eternity, that they may have their part in all the blessings of the covenant, through Jesus Christ, the Great Mediator," &c.

Alas! many a time have the fervours of youthful piety like this, however sincere, and however glowingly expressed, faded away in the course of years and intercourse with society: but with Oberlin it was not so. His course was "as the shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day." The Ban de la Roche was his first pastoral charge; for although he had taken orders some time before Mr. Stouber applied to him, he had employed himself for the intervening five or six years chiefly in study and in private teaching. This interval was, no doubt, of great service in his future career, for as Oberlin was one who never missed an opportunity of acquiring knowledge, he gathered together stores of useful practical information, which afterwards came into full use in his ministry: thus, while residing in the house of a distin-

guished practitioner, he made himself acquainted with medicine and surgery, which proved a material aid to him in the Ban de la Roche.

On the new Pastor's arrival at his parish, he seems to have been at once impressed with the necessity of bringing all his acquisitions to bear upon the great end of the improvement of the people, and to feel that he must serve them, not merely as a preacher, but as a friend and counsellor and fellow-worker, in many matters belonging to this world as well as to another. This had been Mr. Stouber's plan, and he had been to some extent successful. He was now ever ready to give his young successor the aids of his past experience with the people, and nothing can be more judicious than the manner in which he cautions Oberlin against the various dangers of his station. How heartily is it to be wished that many benevolent, but rather too meddling and busy men, would read and meditate on these sentences in one of Stouber's letters!

"By endeavouring too much to induce your people to adopt your plans in preference to others, and on account of some supposed superiority over those to which they have been accustomed, you will defeat your own purposes, and excite their suspicion and disgust. I advise you, therefore, *for the present*, to leave them pretty much to their own devices, and to labour in charity and love for their souls, firmly believing that by so doing you will obtain the

greatest blessing. This is the last thing that experience taught me while I lived in the Steinthal, or rather since I left it. I much regret having occasionally induced the people to do things against their will. If I were now there, I would leave them much more to themselves; and however indifferent might be the appearance of external affairs, I would *say* little to them on the subject of economy or management, but by evincing a sincere interest in their concerns, I would endeavour to gain their confidence, and induce them to regard me as their friend; and then, having once obtained their confidence, and a proportionate degree of influence, I would exert it, to the utmost of my ability, to their advantage, both in the instruction of the young and the conversion of the old, seeking to win their affections by my earnest desire to promote their spiritual interests. If you adopt this method, my dear friend, God will take care of the rest. Necessity will compel your people to employ themselves, and they will think a thousand times better of their own schemes than of any which you could propose to them."

Again he writes,

"You have more influence over others than I have; and this, provided you fear no one but God, and guard against forming too many schemes, will render you in truth more useful than I have been. But I must remind you, that, even when deeply engaged in good works,

it is possible to depart from spiritual Christianity; and I would, on this account, urge you to keep a constant guard over yourself. You have been brought under the influence of religion, and, in the usual sense of the term, converted to God; but, without constant prayer to Him, and the most zealous watchfulness, there is a danger lest you should rest satisfied with this, and relapse into indifference. By being so incessantly occupied in the prosecution of your favourite schemes, and destitute of stimulating society, you may become cold and lukewarm in your religious duties, and less devoted in your service to God, even while busily employed in promoting the well-being of your fellow-creatures. I would, therefore, earnestly exhort you, my dear friend, to be always 'fervent in spirit, serving the Lord,' living only to and for Him. Thus you will be enabled to overcome difficulties; you will find comfort and peace in believing, and He will protect, guide, and bless you. Your work will prosper, not, perhaps, in the manner which you design, but in the way which God hath purposed."—*Memoir*, p. 51.

The year after Oberlin's arrival at the Ban de la Roche, he married Madeleine Witter, a lady who proved in every respect a blessing to the Pastor and his parish. He brought her home to his parsonage, which was the dwelling formerly inhabited by Mr. Stouber, in the village of Waldbach. Here was *one* of his three

churches; the other was at Belmont; the third at Foudai.

In faithful observance of the counsels of his friend Stouber, we find him avoiding, wherever possible, the appearance of urging his people "to do things against their will." Having a great desire to put them upon a better mode of cultivating fruit and vegetables, he bethought himself of letting them simply see the effects of his method in his own gardens, which were crossed by public footpaths, and therefore very conspicuous. He there put in operation all the plans he wished to see pursued, digging trenches of great depth for his young trees, and surrounding them with suitable soil. He procured slips of *good* apples, pears, walnuts, plums, &c., and made a complete nursery-ground of one of the gardens, waiting patiently until his neighbours should of their own free will observe his improvements, and express a wish to profit by his assistance.

It happened as he had hoped. His gardens and orchard flourished; and the peasants, passing by, were astonished at the Pastor's fine trees, and, comparing them with the usual produce of their own soil, soon came to Oberlin to know the secret of his success. The same thing occurred with regard to the culture of the potatoe, and also that of flax and of Dutch clover. The soil he had to deal with was of a very unpromising kind—often a very slight covering of mould over a bed of rock or sand-

stone; hence the agriculturist wanted the aid of every thing that could be collected in the shape of manure, as every few feet of good productive earth was a treasure of great price; and Oberlin spared no pains to bring about an increase of the productive powers of the soil, by even giving rewards for old woollen rags, shoes, and every kind of decayed vegetable matter. Hand in hand with these internal improvements, were carried on his even more important efforts to open freer communication with more civilized places.

In his ideas of the advantages to be derived from quick and easy intercourse with towns, Oberlin was remarkably sound and liberal. No little fears and jealousies prevented his encouraging his people to give and take whatever benefits may be drawn from these sources. We find in him no cant about country innocence, or careful anxiety to immure his flock in the bosom of their own mountains; but one of his earliest objects was, to persuade them to form such roads as would enable them, "instead of being imprisoned nine months out of the twelve, to keep up an intercourse with the people of the neighbouring districts." The matter was not easy, for the villagers were alike stupid and stubborn; but Oberlin's example—the sight of their pastor resolutely handling the pickaxe, and making a beginning upon the new road himself—prevailed; they began and went on, but still *he* did not give up, and it was ob-

served that he always selected the worst parts of the work for himself. In about two years the road, which, in its course, had to be carried over torrents, cut out of the rock, or raised as a causeway across the spots usually inundated in rainy seasons, was completed, and a communication opened with Strasburg. Still, as much time was lost on the journey to and fro, and as, if any of the agricultural implements were damaged, none were to be had nearer than this city, Oberlin's next care was to procure a store, and stock a warehouse at Waldbach with the most needful articles. He then, in pursuance of the same purposes, sent some youths to Strasburg, to learn the different businesses of carpenters, glaziers, masons, &c., &c., and set these new workmen on their return to erect a few improved dwellings, which might and did set the fashion of greater neatness and comfort in the habitations of the district. We shall hereafter recur to the means by which the Pastor promoted education in the Ban de la Roche; in this place we shall only remark upon the pains he took to break down the barrier which a barbarous provincial language placed between his people and the surrounding country. In none of the schools were the children allowed to speak this jargon, but every possible means were adopted, and, in time, with good success, to promote the use of good and intelligible French as the means of communication through the district.

The reader will have observed how anxiously Mr. Stouber exhorts his friend to be on his guard against too many plans, and how faithfully he warns him not to neglect cultivating a habit of constant religious reference. He evidently feared that the man of business would be too much for the Pastor. It does not appear that there was, at any time, ground for this apprehension, for Oberlin's character was one very much formed after the clerical pattern, and was not, perhaps, wholly free from the less desirable peculiarities of that character. In other times, living and acting among more civilized men, we can imagine that his great bodily and mental activity, and the direction it took, would have rendered him an object of dislike to brother philanthropists, on whose sphere he might have intruded, and although the extreme sweetness and kindliness of his disposition persuades us that he would have given way and disarmed jealousy by his meekness, we believe he would have been infinitely less happy and useful. The minutiæ into which he descended—such as interference with parents in the dress of their children, though allowable in the circumstances of the district, would have been very distasteful to a people farther advanced in civilization.

There have been always individuals ready enough to imitate Oberlin in this somewhat inquisitorial spirit, which is only tolerable when set in action by a spirit of love and devotion to his work as intense as his was, and which even

in his case we believe was carried too far. It is always unwise to render our fellow-creatures too dependent on a human being, however exalted,—the powers of judgment are weakened, and a habit of referring to human authority induced. On the whole, however, it must be said of Oberlin, that never was a work better fitted to the agent, or an agent to the work.

Let us view him for a few moments as the more direct religious instructor.—Oberlin, we have been told, "was strictly orthodox and evangelical;" there is no doubt that he was a believer in the Trinity, and also, but in by no means the high Calvinistic sense, in the corruption of our nature and the doctrine of Atonement. Nothing, however, in the memorials which have been transmitted to us, is more remarkable than the absence of that absorbing reference to difficult and disputed doctrines which is so customary in evangelical sermons. "The main doctrine," it is confessed by his amiable biographer, "that seemed to occupy his whole mind, was, that God was his Father." "Our Father," as he would not unfrequently say, "and thus we may *always* feel him." He would preach, we are told, "very alarmingly on the judgment to come and the punishment of the wicked;" but yet he certainly held the doctrine of Universal Restoration. He might be, in some respects, fanciful in his creed, "interpreting," says his biographer, "the text, 'In my Father's house there are

many mansions,' so literally as to consider that there was an exact correspondence between our state here and the very mansion we should enter hereafter; and this relation, or proportion of happiness, he seemed to himself to have so accurately ascertained, by the help of types drawn from different parts of the temple, beginning with the outer court of the sanctuary, and ending with the Holy of Holies, and from expressions denoting the state of the redeemed in the Book of Revelations, as to be able to draw a map of the other world; *and this map he printed and hung up in his church.* He also held the doctrine of an intermediate state, which he supposed to be one of continual improvement, and likewise believed that we shall become progressively holy in heaven."

Alas! that such a faith as this last-mentioned should ever for a moment be classed among "fanciful and unwarranted notions"—that the noblest object for which man can wish to emerge from the dark prison of the tomb—*that*, we mean, of entering on a career of ever-growing and brightening holiness, should come to be considered, even for a moment, as the fancy of the visionary!

"Again," says his biographer, "he *seemed* to (he DID) hope that the passage, 1 Cor. xv. 28, where it is said that 'all things' shall be subjected unto the Almighty, and the Son himself also shall be subjected, 'that God may be all in all,' might include, not only the little flock of

Christ's immediate followers, but ultimately, at some almost indefinite period, through the boundless mercy of God and the blood of Jesus, which was shed for the sins of the *whole* world, all the race of mankind. And he was strengthened in this belief by understanding, *in another than the ordinary sense*, that, 'as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.' *It is needless to say of these doctrines, that they are fanciful and mistaken, and not to be defended by an accurate application of Scripture.*" A mild sentence, when compared with that usually pronounced upon them; but, mild even as it is, not to be dismissed without regret for its peremptory tone. In general spirit no Christian of any sect has ever shewn himself more decidedly liberal than Pastor Oberlin; not one harsh condemnatory expression from his pen or lips has ever yet been brought forward to serve the purposes of party feeling. We do not believe such could be found. Knowing what was his general spirit, and what the conscientious habit of his mind, (for he believed it displeasing to God, in the remembrance of whose presence he habitually lived, to have written a word or even a letter without care, and he thought it his duty to give every letter its due honour,)—knowing this scrupulous character of his mind, we cannot believe that Oberlin ever penned an uncharitable remark. His whole practice breathed benignity. With the Catholic he was on terms of friendliness and

peace; and on one occasion, when a poor persecuted Jew was insulted by the villagers, his indignation was irrepressible; he rebuked his people with warmth. "The poor stranger might," he said, "want the *name* of a Christian, but they wanted the *spirit*."

As Oberlin's villages were too far apart to allow of his preaching every week in each, he took his three churches in rotation, and it was customary for some of the peasants of the favoured village to come with a horse to fetch him on the Sunday morning, and to prepare a dinner for him after sermon. This was considered as a great privilege, and all the children of the family were spoken to kindly by the Pastor, and every inquiry made about their progress. It was a curious spectacle to see him in his canonicals, his large beaver and flowing wig, riding along to his church, attended by the peasant carrying, in a leather bag, the gown, books, &c. The church was sure to be full; that at Waldbach held 600 persons, and was always crowded. The services appear to have partaken of the character of domestic worship, and also to have been compounded of catechetical and conversational instruction, as well as of prayer and sermon. Oberlin used to take his place occasionally near the children, call over their names, and make inquiries about the absent. His sermons themselves, though plain, and borrowing all their imagery from things familiar to the people, were carefully

composed, written and committed to memory. The spirit of order, the detestation of slovenliness, which were so remarkable in his character, were sure not to be banished in his performance of his most sacred duties. His MS. books were beautifully written, and passages in his Bible marked with different coloured inks, according to the particular application he made of them in reading or illustration. His sermons, on a Sunday, were always in French; but every Friday he had a service in German, for the benefit of some among his hearers to whom that language was the most familiar. On this day there were generally about 200 attendants, and Oberlin was, on these occasions, more like a father conversing with his children in their own dwelling, than a clergyman merely conducting a public service. That no time might be lost, he begged the women to bring knitting, not for themselves, however, but for their poorer neighbours, and liked to see their fingers busy while he was reading to or addressing them. The frankness and familiarity of these meetings appear somewhat strange to English notions. "Are you tired, my friends?" Oberlin would sometimes ask, after he had been for some time expounding scripture to them. "Have you not had enough?" "No, no, papa,* go on," was the usual answer; but now

* "Papa Oberlin" was the name by which he was known throughout the district.

and then it would be. "Enough, for this one time;" and then the good man would conclude, or change his subject, as he saw most fitting. These were his most familiar services; but specimens are left of a style of preaching at once fervent, rational, chaste, and fitted to awaken and elevate. He was also accustomed to address short and striking letters to his parishioners on various points of duty, as in the following:—

"'And the Lord said to Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not. Am I my brother's keeper?' Gen. iv. 9. Fathers of Belmont, of Bellefosse, of Waldbach, Foudai and Zolbach, where are your sons? In what village? in what house? in what company? How employed? It behoves you to be able to answer these inquiries by night and by day, on Sundays and working days; wherever you are, whatever you are doing. You are the guardians of your children, and whether they are at work or in relaxation and amusement, it is your part to superintend and direct their amusements and pursuits," &c.

In addition to the more general associations which it was Oberlin's endeavour to form among his people for various good objects, he for a time upheld a strictly religious union among some of his parishioners, called "The Christian Society;" but finding that it was liable to abuse, and was made the occasion of much enmity among those who did not choose to belong

to it, he wisely took upon himself the part of dissolving it, saying, "I do this the more easily because Christianity does not consist either in names or in external forms."

As it is impossible to give a fair account of an individual without mention of his weak points, this is perhaps the proper place to touch upon one of Oberlin's least rational notions; and while we do so, it is to be observed that the tinge of superstition or enthusiasm (call it which we may) which it displays, makes it the more remarkable, that throughout his plans, and, indeed, his whole career, the conduct of Oberlin should have been so *generally* governed by sound good sense and a wise calculation of human probabilities. He was constantly in the habit of deciding himself in personal difficulties by *lot*, and devoutly believed that the decision thus given was an answer from Heaven; for this purpose he kept in his pocket two little tickets, the one with the word "Yes," the other "No," inscribed upon it, and these he always referred to, with prayer. In the affair of his marriage he was also guided in a somewhat similar manner.

We have before said, that the result of this connexion, however determined, was for Oberlin's happiness and the good of his people. It was not, however, destined to be, according to his wish, a source of comfort during the whole of his remaining earthly career. It pleased God to remove this beloved companion after

about sixteen years of happy union, leaving him with seven children, three sons and four daughters. The first effect of the stroke, which was a sudden one, was very overpowering to him; yet his first movement on recovering from the state of temporary stupor into which it threw him, was to thank God who had taken her to himself by so gentle a dismissal:—"I hope," he soon afterwards added, "that the world in which God will re-unite me to my beloved wife will soon open to me." He elsewhere, in a private memorandum, says, that he has all his life felt a desire to die, "owing to the consciousness of my moral infirmities," he adds, "and my frequent derelictions."

It may be said, that Oberlin's benevolence from this time took a tone, if possible, of greater gentleness, and that he shewed a still deeper feeling of sympathy in human affliction of every kind; he seemed to care less and less for himself; his time, his property, his thoughts, were all for others. To his children he was an excellent father. Unlike many men whose minds are occupied with public concerns, he certainly did not neglect his home, and among his most remarkable achievements must be numbered the perfect success which appears to have crowned his domestic plans. Now, upon the death of Mrs. Oberlin, he found himself greatly assisted in the care of his children by an excellent woman, who had already lived eight years

in his service, and had, besides this, been extremely useful in his schools. This woman, who was yet young, no sooner found that by remaining in Oberlin's family she could really render him essential service, than she resolved to devote herself to this one duty, and stipulated with her master that he should admit her, however, in the light of an adopted daughter, not giving her wages, but allowing her to apply to him in her necessities.

Her request was granted. For forty-two years after the decease of Mrs. Oberlin she lived as a daughter in Oberlin's household, and when death removed the aged Pastor, he left the following sealed letter behind him, bearing this striking testimony to her merit:—

"My very dear children,

"In leaving you, I commend to your care the faithful nurse who has brought you up, the indefatigable Louisa. The services she has performed for our family are innumerable. Your dear mamma took her under her care before she had attained the age of fifteen. * * * *"

Oberlin here recites her services, adding,

"She received a sufficient recompense, you will perhaps say, in the ample salary that I allowed her. No, dear children, no: since the death of your dear mother I have not been able to prevail on her to accept the smallest reward for her services: she employed her own little

property in doing good, and in the purchase of her scanty wardrobe, and it was always as a favour that she received from me some slight articles of dress and provisions, which I owed nevertheless to her economy and good management. Judge, my dear children, of the debt you have contracted from her services to me, and how far you will ever be from repaying it.

"In times of sickness and affliction, how tenderly has she watched over both you and me! How kindly has she sought to mitigate our pains and assuage our griefs! Once more, I commend her to you. You will testify, by the care you take of her, how much attention you pay to the last wish of a father who has always endeavoured to inspire you with feelings of gratitude and benevolence. But yes, yes; you will be, in your turn, individually and collectively, all that she has been to you, as far as your means, situation, and opportunity permit.

"Adieu, my very dear children,

"J. F. OBERLIN."

So well disposed, adds the Biographer, were Oberlin's children to fulfil this request, that they offered Louisa an equal share of the little property their father had left. This she refused, asking nothing more than permission to remain an inmate of the family, and to be allowed to add the honoured name of *Oberlin* to her own. "It is almost superfluous to say," writes one of his children, "that while a de-

scendant of Oberlin's remains, Louisa shall want for nothing, at least until they themselves are destitute."*

As we have been adverting to the domestic comforts and affliction of Oberlin, it may be as well to carry on the account of his own family to a later period, before we return to the affairs of the Ban de la Roche.

The eldest son, Frederic, to whom the father was peculiarly attached, entered the army as a volunteer, and was very soon afterwards killed in battle, at the age of twenty-four, to the grief of the family. The two remaining sons, Charles and Henry, were clergymen. Charles afterwards assisted his father in the Ban de la Roche, being a physician as well as pastor; and Henry, whose character was a singularly delightful one, was sent, for some time, to Russia, where he was private tutor in the family of a nobleman at Riga. One of the daughters, marrying a Russian clergyman, was for a time expatriated in like manner. Two others, also marrying clergymen, settled not far from the Steinthal. It was, indeed, the point of attraction to them all,—and though some of the members of the family wandered to a distance, they all returned at last. Henry, on his return from Russia, visited the Vaudois churches in Piedmont, and was labouring with all his father's

* Louisa Scheppler is now no more. She died a few months ago, (January 1838,) retaining the same devoted and affectionate spirit to the last.—Editor.

spirit in their cause, when he was seized with a severe indisposition, and died, after a few months' illness, in his father's house. The pious resignation of Oberlin was never more remarkably displayed than on the death of Henry, whose missionary spirit and ardent benevolence particularly resembled his own, and who was adored by his family and the neighbourhood. He was buried by his mother, the father himself reading the address at his interment, and afterwards preaching a most forcible and striking sermon on the occasion, taking for his text the words which had been constantly on his son's lips during the dying scene, "*From death unto life.*" John v. 24.

After this severe dispensation, Oberlin was still far from being deserted. His daughter, Mrs. Graff, came with her husband and six children from Russia, and settled at Waldbach, from this time to the period of her father's death. Her husband was a valuable assistant to Oberlin during the latter part of his career, and remained Pastor in the district after his decease, only relinquishing the office in consequence of illness—his post being then taken by Mr. Rauscher, who married another of the daughters. This excellent couple still reside at Waldbach, and, to the present day, carry on the work which Oberlin began. Thus the series of effective labourers in the Ban de la Roche has been continued, and thus was Oberlin favoured by the encouraging presence and anticipation of

faithful coadjutors in those of his own household.

The manner in which the family lived together, and some of their domestic habits, are described with such liveliness by a lady who visited the Ban de la Roche in Oberlin's declining years, that it would be great injustice to all parties not to give it.

"I never knew so well what the *grace* of courtesy was till I saw Pastor Oberlin. He treats the poorest people, and even the children, with an affectionate respect. For instance, his courtesy, kindness, and hospitality to our postillion were quite amusing: he pulled off his hat when we met, took him by the hand, and treated him with really tender consideration. He is, I think, more than eighty—one of the handsomest old men I ever remember to have seen, still vigorous in mind and spirit, delighting in his parish, full of fervent charity. * * * The meals are really amusing. We all sit down to the same table, (Oberlin, Mr. and Mrs. Graff, their six children, Louisa, two young girls, protegées, and two more maid servants out of the parish,) one great dish of pottage or boiled spinach, and a quantity of salad and potatoes, upon which they usually live, being placed in the middle. * * * We breakfast at seven; the family upon potatoes boiled with milk and water; a little coffee is provided for us. We dine at twelve, and sup at half-past seven.—He (Oberlin) shakes hands with all the little

children as he passes them in the street, speaking particularly to them as well as individually. It is quite wonderful to see the effect and polish which this sort of treatment and manner has had upon these people, uncultivated and uncivilized as they were before, by all accounts. I never met with any thing like the cultivation of mind among *poor* people. They have been taught a variety of things, which have enlarged and polished their minds, besides religion, music, geography, drawing, botany, &c. If you go into a cottage, they quite expect that you will eat and drink with them; a clean cloth is laid upon the table, washed almost as white as milk, and the new milk and the wine and the great loaf of bread are brought out: yet they are in reality exceedingly poor. Their beds, also, look so clean and so good, they would astonish our poor people. In some respects, I think they are decidedly cleaner than our poor. Their dress is simple to the greatest degree. Their women and girls all dress alike, even down to the very little children. They wear caps of dark cotton, with black ribbon, and the hair bound closely under. Everybody—maids, children, poor, and rich, call Mr. Oberlin their 'dear Papa;' and never was there a more complete father of a large family," &c., &c.—*Memoir*, p. 297.

There is something gained by anticipating events, when we are thus carried on to contrast the pictures of two very different stages of so-

ciety. The reader has seen how it was in the Ban de la Roche, when Oberlin first went there; he now sees it as it was in the latter part of his ministry. *Some* of the means by which the change was wrought have been mentioned; let us now advert to others. And, first, with regard to Education. When Oberlin came to Waldbach, he found only one school-house; nor was it without much difficulty that he accomplished the erection of another, at his own cost and that of some friends at Strasburg, the people fearing that, if not now, they should hereafter be called upon to share the expenses of the establishment; nor were their objections silenced until he entered into an engagement that the school should never become chargeable on the parish funds. At length, however, the matter was settled, the building erected, and the masters, who had been selected and prepared by Oberlin, put under requisition; and so popular did the school become, that, in a very few years, school-houses were erected in all the other villages, and the inhabitants themselves were the first to come forward, offering to take upon them the expense and much of the trouble attending them.

In these villages Oberlin, soon afterwards, was enabled also to introduce schools for the younger children, (perhaps the first Infant Schools ever established,) where the little ones were taught by women a variety of useful and entertaining things, which prepared the way for

their entrance into the higher schools. They were never allowed to speak the common *patois*, but pure French was encouraged in every possible way.

The instruction given in the upper schools was of a superior kind; not merely reading and arithmetic, but geography, astronomy, and something of sacred and profane history, were likewise taught; while, every Sunday, they had a distinct service and religious instruction from the Pastor himself, and, in general, a weekly meeting of scholars took place at Waldbach. By degrees a library was formed, and various works were not only procured, but *printed* for the use of the district: among these was an Almanac, prepared by Oberlin himself, freed from the false notions and superstitions with which those books were usually filled.

Botany and the intimate knowledge of trees, plants, and flowers, were also much cultivated among the young people. They were encouraged by the Pastor to make little gardens of their own, and to transplant any flowers or fruits they met with in their walks. They also learnt to draw the flowers, some of the scholars succeeding in this remarkably well. Written compositions were now and then required from them, the subjects of which were of a useful, practical kind: sometimes they were on agriculture, sometimes on natural history. Throughout the whole plan of instruction and education, one leading idea was never lost sight of; the

pupils were all taught, early and late, that they were all of one family, and that each must contribute his portion to the public good. It was shewn them, that their maintenance and comforts depended almost wholly on the produce of their own valley, and that, therefore, there must be neither indolence nor waste. In conformity with this, every young person, previous to confirmation, was required to bring a certificate from his parents, setting forth that he had planted, in a spot described, two young trees.

The fearful period of the French Revolution came to the Ban de la Roche with less of transforming power than, probably, to any other region. It found the people there already, according to Oberlin's ideas of the term, republicans. "We are republicans," said he, in a paper addressed at this time to his parishioners, "when we neither live, nor act, nor undertake any thing, nor choose a profession or situation, nor settle in life, except for the public good."

The withdrawal of government support from the ministers of religion was, in the case of poor parishes, however, a severe temporary affliction. —Oberlin, deprived of his whole stipend, was thus obliged to throw himself upon his parishioners, who cheerfully answered the appeal; yet they could only succeed in raising a sum, equivalent to sixty pounds of our money, the first year, and, in the second, it had dwindled to sixteen, no fees being usually given by these poor people at births, deaths, or marriages.—

Oberlin then felt the necessity of taking pupils into his family, and, these being for the most part of rich and distinguished families, his income was thereby rendered tolerably sufficient. His parishioners, also, brought him presents; he had thrown himself upon them, and they had only to bring each his quota, in whatever form he thought proper; but this was an uncertain gratuity, and none but a spirit so meek and unsuspicious as Oberlin's would have borne, as he did, such a mode of remuneration. His *expenditure* was most strictly regulated, for there was nothing in which he was more particular than with regard to debt. "Avoid debts," he used to say, "as you would the Evil Spirit."

But we have to mention an instance of more remarkable scrupulosity.—When the assignats (paper-money of the French Revolution) lost their value, he was fearful of the injury which might be sustained both by individuals and the government; and he made it a point to devote part of his small means to buying up such of these notes as had found their way into the Ban de la Roche. Every year he had a public sale of agricultural implements and other useful articles, and for these he desired to be paid in this worthless paper money. It took long to redeem all the assignats, as long, indeed, as twenty-five years; but Oberlin, by the end of that time, entirely succeeded, and, to his great joy, managed to buy up the whole of the number in circulation.

Nothing has as yet been said of the numbers of the population of Oberlin's district. On his first arrival, there were not more than between eighty and a hundred families; but, in the course of a few years, these had increased to five or six hundred, and there were now more than three thousand souls. This was the point of difficulty in Oberlin's career. Had no lucrative source of employment been provided at this juncture for these increased numbers, there can be no doubt that, notwithstanding all which had been done to increase and improve the fruits and grain, the people would soon have been in a very wretched state. Straw-platting, spinning by hand, dyeing with the plants of the country, and weaving, had all been tried; but new machinery having been set up in some of the neighbouring villages, it was plain that, unless the Ban de la Roche could receive fresh impulse from the employment of capital, it would soon relapse into want and misery.

Most happily at this juncture, Mr. Legrand, a wealthy ribbon manufacturer, of benevolent dispositions, by whom Oberlin had long been known and esteemed, came to the relief of the district. He persuaded his two sons, who conducted the business, to remove their manufactory to the Steinthal. By a singular concurrence of circumstances, this removal was hastened, and Mr. Daniel and Mr. Joseph Legrand brought their resources to the Ban de la Roche. In every respect this proved

a blessing. The brothers delighted in co-operating with Oberlin; and it was said by one of them, after an experience of four years, that "the pleasure they derived from residing among a people whose manners were softened, and whose minds were enlightened by instruction, more than reconciled them to the privations they must necessarily experience in the Steinthal." Their manufactory flourished, and hundreds of hands were employed, not under one roof, but at looms which could be wrought in their own houses.

Years afterwards, the members of this useful and excellent family are thus spoken of by the lady from whose letter, on visiting the Ban de la Roche, we have already quoted: "I will now introduce you to the Legrands, one of the most cheerful and happy families one often sees. Their house is complete in its way, and full of comfort for a foreign habitation. The father and mother, with their two sons, both married to sweet women, live together. They seemed beaming with goodness and happiness, evidently most domestic, and, I should trust, religious people, devotedly attached to Mr. Oberlin, their friend and pastor, for whose sake they settled in this place."

From this time it may be said that the Ban de la Roche prospered unceasingly, till the period when it pleased God to call him to himself who had so long been its best benefactor. But

its peace and plenty and comparative prosperity did not bring in selfish indulgence and indifference to the interests of the rest of the world. Who *can*, who *ought*, ever to forget that from this region, insulated as it seemed to be, poor and long neglected, issued streams of benevolence which have already poured fertility upon many a barren spot? Who can forget that the poor and sometime ignorant inhabitants of the Ban de la Roche sent contributions, from time to time, to theological colleges at Strasburg, at Montauban, and at Neuhof; to the Paris Bible Society, and to the British and Foreign, and to various Missionary Societies?

When a being, faithful, unchanging, and devoted, like Oberlin, has been permitted for nearly sixty years to labour in one corner of his Master's vineyard, what can we say, but that such a labourer has had his ample allotment of service, that it is time for him to go to his rest, and "enter into the joy of his Lord"? "Yes! I AM happy!" was the good old man's fervent expression to some friends, who were conversing with him on the peaceful appearances of all around him. That happiness seems to have attended him nearly to the closing hour. His last illness was short, affecting him only for about four days. "Lord Jesus! take me speedily. Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done!" was all he said respecting himself; but he often invoked blessings on his surround-

ing friends. His last effort of consciousness was in lifting up his eyes to heaven, his countenance beaming with faith, joy, and love.

Who can tell the sorrow which the news of their father's death spread through his children of the district? All ranks, all ages, animated by one common feeling, gathered round the house where his remains awaited their removal to their last home; and so great was the concourse on the day of interment, that the procession extended from the parsonage to the church of Foudai, full two miles distant. Among these mourners were to be numbered not those of his own communion alone, but many Catholics, and several even of the priests. The ceremony was rendered yet more impressive by the production of a paper of Oberlin's, a sort of dying charge to his parishioners, in which he recapitulated many of the circumstances of their long union, and invoked blessings on their heads. "Whenever any of you die, may you die in Jesus! and may I meet you and accompany you, with songs of triumph, in the mansions of happiness, before the Throne of the Lamb. Adieu, dear friends, adieu! May God reward you for your services, and the deference and submission you have shewn towards his poor, unworthy servant."

What may not one good man do! It does not appear to us that Oberlin possessed shining talents, profound information, or even, in all points, a clear and vigorous judgment. But he

had that happy mixture of warm devotional feeling and ardent love of his fellow-creatures, with practical, common-sense, business-like habits, which never fails to make its possessor a blessing to society. Oberlin was as gentle in manner, as he was firm and resolved in principle. We cannot imagine the instance in which he could have enacted the village tyrant. MAN, in all his diversities of character and station, was still the object of his respect; he reverenced the image of his Creator in the creature; and all his actions, his words, and his ways, were governed by that heartfelt homage to what is in itself holy, many as may be the defilements it has contracted. This trait in Oberlin's mind—its strong practical influence upon him—is but too rare: we impute much of his success to it. The villagers felt themselves *men* in his presence; he raised, cheered, ennobled them. He had his reward. He was loved and revered, not by a few ignorant or fanatical rustics, but by well-taught, well-disciplined minds. The power he obtained was worth having; it was a religious, moral, and mental influence,—such as is alone worthy the ambition of a faithful follower of Christ. When we bring before our minds the *Master himself*, indeed,—his perfection of moral power—the weapons by which he drew to himself the holy and the unholy,—we feel that every comparison falls very short in all points. We only say thus much,—that the more of faith and love and holiness, the more

of the spirit of Christ, and the nearer the approaches of the servant to the pattern of his Lord.

On lowly lips His name is found,
And simple hearts yet hold him dear;
The Patriarch of the village round,
The Pastor of the churches near.

The holy cautions which he gave,
The prayers he breath'd, the tears he wept,
Yet linger here, though in his grave
For many a year the saint has slept.

EDMESTON.

LIFE OF NEFF.

THE LIFE

OF

FELIX NEFF.

In the French Province of Dauphiné, and in the department called the High Alps, which separate France from Italy, there is a region which has been, from the earliest recorded period, remarkable for its peculiarities of climate and soil, and for the extreme intricacy of the passages between its lofty mountains. So great a difference is produced by the position as well as height of these mountains in the temperature of the valleys, that in the course of a two days' journey, you will be alternately enjoying a cheerful sun, rejoicing in the midst of pleasant villages, and shivering amid black rocks and frozen snows, and all the symptoms of barrenness and desolation. In the sixteenth century, the historian De Thou described the inhabitants as nearly as possible under their present character. He spoke of them as uncleanly in their

habits, miserably poor, living in entire seclusion among themselves, but far from being destitute of mental cultivation. He said that many of them understood Latin, and were able to write fairly; that they could read the Bible in French, and sing the Psalms, and you could hardly find a boy among them who, if questioned, would not be able to give a clear account of his faith, which was that of the Waldenses.—There can be no doubt that among these Alpine recesses, even from the second century after the establishment of Christianity, there have been Christians who have always rejected the worship of images, and many of the other superstitions which crept into the Romish Church. They cannot be classed with Protestant dissidents, for they have, from all time, remained pure from the corruptions which the Reformation was designed to overthrow. These Christians of Dauphiné are under the government of France, while their brethren of Piedmont are under that of the King of Sardinia. There has always been, however, a bond of strict brotherhood between them; and the Alps of Dauphiné have often afforded places of refuge to the persecuted Vaudois of Piedmont, while the Christians of Dauphiné have, in return, received spiritual instruction and comfort from the Piedmontese pastors, when utterly neglected themselves. For many years they were without pastors of their own; nor could they receive the visits which these brethren in adversity hazarded their lives to

pay them, without the utmost danger. Since the year 1802, however, the Protestant churches of the High Alps have been recognized by the French Government as legally constituted, and their pastors have been promised pensions from the State; these privileges being subjected to many regulations, which have rendered it difficult to provide for the wants of a people living in so very intricate and wild a country.

The Department of the High Alps of Dauphiné has never, in consequence of these regulations, which required that a consistory (to which was confided the appointment of six pastors at the utmost) should consist of not less than six thousand souls of the same communion, been able to establish more than one consistory; and though the department is eighty-four miles in length and fifty-seven in breadth, it has never had above two sections to which pastors have been appointed. One of these sections is named Orpierre, the other Arvieux. The latter is the one with which we have to do.

It was on the 16th of January, 1824, that Felix Neff, of whose proceedings among the Alpine Christians of Dauphiné we are going to speak, came to the district of Arvieux as its appointed Pastor.—A few words respecting his previous character and circumstances will suffice. Felix Neff was born near Geneva, in the year 1798. A widowed mother is said to have bestowed much care on him in childhood, and

his pastor taught him Latin, botany, history, and geography. His first settled occupation was that of a gardener or nursery-man, and, when only sixteen, he published a little book on the culture of trees. The following year, however, he renounced these peaceful employments, and entered into the military service of Geneva as a private soldier; two years afterwards he was promoted to the rank of sergeant of artillery, and was esteemed as an efficient and useful sub-officer. He was also reckoned a pretty good proficient in mathematics, which had become his favourite study next to the subject of theology, which had begun to take a deep hold on him. As he early adopted the views of the rigidly Calvinistic party, he made himself an object of some dislike among his superior officers, who probably entertained the more liberal views prevailing at Geneva; but so decided was the bent of his mind, that it became, after a time, the advice of those who best knew him, that he should quit the army and prepare himself for holy orders. This, accordingly, he did, going through, according to an excellent custom of the Protestant churches, both in Switzerland and France, the probationary work of a catechist, or lay-helper, under the eye of an experienced minister. In Neff's case, this term of probation lasted three years, during which, though still unordained, he taught the young, visited the sick, and occasionally preached in Neufchatel, Berne, and the Pays de Vaud.

In 1821, when twenty-four years of age, he was invited, though still not in orders, to assist a pastor at Grenoble, and, six months afterwards, at Mens. Both these scenes of labour being in France, brought him acquainted with the state of the people of the High Alps, of whom he frequently heard; and though his situation at Grenoble and Mens was infinitely more agreeable, his affections were bent on that particular district, with a longing desire to be one of its pastors.

It was necessary, however, that he should be ordained. This necessity presented a difficulty. Neff's views were rigidly Calvinistic, and though not a hint is given by his biographer that there would have been any difficulty interposed in the way of his ordination at Geneva, the sturdy theologian felt the inconsistency of seeking an introduction to an *orthodox* ministry at the hands of those whom he regarded as in the highest degree heterodox. Differing widely, as we do, from Felix Neff in religious opinions, and especially in the narrow and chilling estimate which, as it seems to us, he had formed of the disposition of our Creator to his creatures, we think he was right on this point. By going to liberal ministers for his authority to preach the Gospel, he, who was no liberal, would have been guilty of an act of hypocrisy, which must immediately have been followed by a line of conduct placing him in alliance with men who, for their acts of contumacy against the Genevan

Church, have been ejected from among her ministers. True, it may be said, but why should he *not* join the seceding pastors? We, as Dissenters, have not much sympathy with his scruples here. It was Neff's case, however, to believe that a National Church was an instrument of much good, and that although, at this time, to his apprehension, it was under a cloud, it might, by what he would deem a reformation of itself from within, become once more what he, and those who thought like him, desired.

There was also an objection to his being ordained in France; he was by birth a Swiss, and certain forms of naturalization must be gone through. Neff, then, concluded to come to London, where he was ordained at a chapel in the Poultry, and returned as quickly as possible to the South of France.

In October 1823, while at Grenoble, he received an invitation from the elders of the Protestant churches in the district of Arvieux, and learned that they had applied to the Consistory for permission to appoint him as their minister. The Consistory was wholly favourable, and the choice of the elders was never repented of; but it does not appear that Neff regularly obtained the forms legally necessary for a Government Pastor, nor had he ever a Government pension. His salary was about £30 a year, received from the Continental Society. For this trifling remuneration let us now see what was the charge he undertook. His

Parish of Arvieux comprised seventeen or eighteen villages, occupying an extent of sixty miles in a direct line from east to west; but, allowing for the necessary circuits and windings in the way, certainly requiring a journey of near eighty miles. Suppose the Pastor took up his residence at the *Parsonage House* provided for him in La Chalpe, one of these villages, he would have twelve miles to travel before reaching the extent of his pastoral charge in one direction, sixty in another, twenty towards the south, and thirty-three towards the north. This was the real circuit of Felix Neff's labours, and the above the extent of his actual salary, independent of the dwelling provided for him and the casual hospitalities and offerings which might come from the hands of an extremely poor people, against which must be set the calls which the extreme destitution of some among them would naturally make upon the scanty means of their benevolent Pastor. To this place, to the parsonage at La Chalpe, a small, low, white building, as plain and bare as it could well be, Neff went, in the middle of a cold January, and he went *alone*. No domestic comforts or endearments awaited him, and there was little in the aspect of the country, even in summer, to attract him. Some of the Piedmontese valleys in which the Vaudois are at length allowed to worship God in peace, are beautiful and fertile, and the inhabitants have large herds of cattle and goats. But in the

Alps of Dauphiné, this fertility is very rare; and the prevailing character of the scenery is comfortless and stern grandeur, and continual dangers from avalanches and torrents, and thick deceitful mountain mists.

The immediate neighbourhood of La Chalpe and the commune of Arvieux were by far the most cheerful among the scenes of Neff's labours. He soon found, however, that the most barren and, to all appearance, disheartening spots, were really those to which he was destined to be most useful. It may be doubted, indeed, whether the fault was entirely in the *people;* but certain it is, that he complained of their being spoilt, in these more civilized districts, by the advantages of their situation. We cannot help thinking that, in his estimate of these villages, he was probably influenced by the same spirit of austerity which we lament in his dealings with himself; and when we find him, according to the account of a missionary who lately visited the scene of his labours, cutting down with a hatchet some rose trees which he had planted in his garden and watched with the utmost care, because his heart was too much in his flowers, we can well conceive that he would look with a reproving eye on the dancing and village sports around him.

In fact Neff, excellent as he was and useful as we shall find him to have been in his vocation, was very far from possessing the enlarged mind of Oberlin; and had his life been ever so

much prolonged, would not, probably, have introduced among his flock those social and tasteful arts which Oberlin desired to cultivate. He loved his people with intense affection, but his narrow views of the Divine mercy seem to have made him forget many temporal sources of comfort that might, by their introduction, have contributed to lighten a cheerless and trying lot. Something, no doubt, he did with this view; and taking into account the shortness of his career and the immense labour and self-denial requisite to accomplish even so much, we must not undervalue this; but we doubt whether instruction in reading, writing, and geography should have taken precedence of endeavours to induce greater attention to habits of cleanliness and order. Their miserable stone and mud huts, in which smoke and dirt reign undisturbed from one generation to another, and their persons quite unaccustomed to cold water, the poor inhabitants of some of Neff's higher villages seem to remain much as he found them. Here it was, however, that he spent the greater part of his time; and the efforts he made for the improvement of the people were such as, it may be feared, very few among those who can readily enough point out what he left undone, would have had courage to make. The most neglected and forlorn among the villages committed to his care was named Dormillieuse. It was situated on a rock which would be inaccessible to any but practised

mountain-climbers in the depth of winter, and even in summer is difficult and dangerous. There is but one steep footpath, and this is rendered constantly slippery by the falling water of a cascade which directly crosses it and dashes down into the abyss below. In winter, of course, the difficulty is increased by an accumulation of ice. There is all the toil and danger of grand mountain scenery without the reward of gratification to the eye when the point is attained, for the village itself does not stand on the edge or side of the rock overlooking a grand abyss or a rugged mountain range, but on a flat upon the mountain. It is wholly bleak and gloomy, a collection of mean huts, its inhabitants consisting of forty families. Yet this forlorn rock was once the asylum of brave and faithful men, who retired here from the rage of religious persecution, and whose ruined walls and forts, built for their protection, still remain visible. There are no Catholics at this spot. Every family is of the ancient faith of the Waldenses, which can be traced up 600 years. Here it was that they used to preserve and read the Scriptures. Here is a church, and here Neff preached, for the first time, on Tuesday, the 3d of February, to a large congregation, many people having come up from the lower valley to attend him. To make their passage easier, the Pastor himself, and some of the young men, cut steps in the ice. After staying a day or two among them, he sited another of his vil-

lages, making, in the same manner, the circuit of the whole, even at this inclement season, gathering the young people round him, preparing them to receive the sacrament, and putting things in train for his further ministry. This was his constant plan for the first two years of his stay in Arvieux; he was constantly shifting his station from hamlet to hamlet, spending a fortnight in one, a week in another, according as he found he was most wanted; still retaining, however, his strong partiality for his most mountainous districts, and his jealousy of the influence of the world upon the lower. His house at La Chalpe he had given up for the uses of a school, being content to lodge under any roof or partake of any fare; thus, no doubt, laying the foundation of the disorder which, mainly produced by the use of unwholesome food, occasioned the early termination of his life.

His first efforts were directed to the promotion of a religious spirit among his people, and during the first winter and spring, we accordingly hear chiefly of religious meetings and of fervours which it was easy to see could not, in the nature of things, last. When the summer season had drawn out the inhabitants of the mountains to their occupations, the men to their quarries, the women to their flocks, their hours of rest were broken in upon by these meetings, which were often prolonged far into the night. Many were the converts whom Neff saw around

him, as zealous and ardent as himself; nor is there any reason to believe that they were insincere in their demonstrations of piety—neither does it appear that the flame thus kindled has since expired, except in a very few instances; but Neff had good sense enough soon to see that he must labour not only at kindling the feelings of an affectionate people, but at informing their minds and improving their habits. For this work, by much the longest and most difficult, his time of service was, alas! very short, but he made the most of what was allotted to him.

Accordingly, during his second summer, he appears to have applied himself with much earnestness to this part of his task. He strove, but it would seem not with the best success, to inculcate the advantages of light and air, and the utility of chimneys. He next turned his attention to the improvement of their scanty spots of pasturage—every blade of grass in such a place is a treasure, and during the long winters the cattle suffer severely if the preceding summer has been one of drought. Neff perceived that the waters of these hills and valleys might be directed so as greatly to increase the fertility of these patches of more improvable soil, and he explained to the people that they might, by means of a little labour and expense, construct small canals, which should convey the moisture to the driest parts of the ground. At first he spoke in vain. But another dry sum-

mer came, and after the sufferings of the winter they were rather more favourably disposed. Still many were the objections—one would not work because the benefit would be more his neighbour's than his own; another thought he would only employ himself about his own ground. Neff alternately humoured and entreated; at length he brought over a working party of forty to his mind, and they all began together, the Pastor at their head, working under his directions in companies. They found the remains of an ancient aqueduct, which was rendered serviceable to their present undertaking, and, for a few hours, all worked diligently. Soon, however, it appeared that there would be defaulters, and Neff was obliged to condition that the labourers should stay by him all day, sending for their meals, and himself setting the example: they did so, and even by four o'clock that afternoon the work was so far advanced that they were enabled to flood one meadow by way of experiment. Next day cross cuts were made, and other meadows had the advantage: thus they proceeded till three long channels were made to convey water to three village fountains. This was really, to such inexperienced workmen, a grand undertaking; they had their rocks to undermine and to blast, their granite to bore; but all was brought to a prosperous end, and the Pastor's reputation as an engineer established. He had previously

built a church in one of his villages, fashioning and fixing the pulpit with his own hands.

But supplies of food were still very scanty. They had potatoes already, but the sort and mode of culture were alike bad. Neff, brought up a gardener, understood these things well, and he devoted several days to traversing the valleys during the season for planting, made it his practice to request that he might be allowed to set a row or two in *his* way, leaving it to time to prove which was the best. Many were reluctant, some took the trouble to dig them up again and plant in their own ancient fashion: but the next year nearly all came round to their Pastor's plans, seeing the great superiority of such among the rows planted by him as they had allowed to stand. By the time the second summer had passed away, Neff had matured a plan of winter instruction for the most ignorant among his parishes. He found that, though the people of Dormillieuse were full of ardour and very anxious about holding social religious meetings among themselves, yet such was their profound ignorance, that they could not be trusted unless under his constant influence. He found that, though many of them professed to be able to read, they had not acquaintance enough with *pure* French to be understood in reading aloud; they marred every thing they attempted by their miserable *patois*, and were so uncouth in their articulation, that even in

their common conversation it was difficult to understand them. Their voices were pitched in the sharpest and most unmusical key; and as to music itself, they did not seem to have an idea of it. It was with the view of improving his people that Neff, conceiving it necessary to make himself well acquainted with *their* dialect before he instructed them in his own, devoted himself to learning the *patois* of Dauphiné, and having mastered it, proceeded with his work. Finding the inhabitants of Dormillieuse less prepared to receive such instruction as might speedily fit them for his assistants in teaching, he bethought himself of calling in the aid of the more intelligent in his comparatively civilized villages, and for this purpose invited a few select young men from Val Queyras to spend the winter with him at Dormillieuse, thereby proposing to himself both to found a normal school for teachers, and to improve the poor of the hamlet in which he designed to commence his labours. But it was necessary first to build a school-room. This work was executed by Neff and the people of Dormillieuse, and in a week the roof was put on. The windows, door, chimney, tables and seats, were finished by these willing workmen in no long time after, and a stove was added. Here, then, it was, that Neff gathered together, as *learners*, those who had previously been all eagerness to commence as *teachers*, and gave them the means of instruction. This party of young men who put them-

selves under their Pastor's direction for the winter months, and consented to live in the desolate region of Dormillieuse from November to April, in order that they might acquire the needful branches of knowledge, was twenty-six in number. It was a hard probation, and the success cannot but excite our admiration both for the master and the pupils,—for the docility, patience, and self-denial which led the latter to bear cheerfully a five months' confinement at Dormillieuse, and studies of twelve or fourteen hours a day,—and for the tact and good management which enabled the former to regulate the pursuits of these youths during all that time: to keep them in harmony with one another, with the villagers, and with himself, so as that not one subject of quarrel or jealousy seems to have arisen during the period of their probation.

Look on this picture again and again, prosperous, easy, unenterprising Christians! it has not been overcharged, nay, probably the reader's mind has as yet taken in few of the details which really make it so remarkable. Every one has heard of the difficulties of disciplining a set of college youths of the age of Neff's pupils. What would such youths think of their condition if immured in Dormillieuse, encompassed with snow and ice from November to April, living in filthy mountain huts, on the hardest mountain fare! Of course, the Pastor had laid in their stock of provisions, as it could not be expected that the people of the village should

feed them on any terms out of their own resources, (although they gladly lodged them without remuneration, and even liberally supplied them with fuel,) but this provision was nothing but salted meat and rye bread, which, having been baked in autumn, required to be chopped with hatchets and moistened in hot water, before it was used. Meal and flour soon becoming mouldy in this region, the people are obliged to grind the corn and make it up into bread very soon after threshing.

And now for their studies.—Neff divided the day into three parts—the first from sunrise till eleven o'clock, the next from noon to sunset, the third from supper till ten or eleven at night. Much of the time was devoted to lessons in reading, which their strange unnatural tones and bad pronunciation rendered particularly necessary. Grammar also, of which none of them had any idea, was taught them by Neff, and by a young man, a former convert, who had kindly joined him this winter, although, by so doing, it was necessary for him to leave a situation in which he was diligently improving himself. Arithmetic, of course, was one of the studies, and geography was the entertainment after dinner. In the end they had some lessons in geometry. Music, too, formed part of the evening's amusement, after which Neff read to them some religious book, commenting as he read.

Most of the young lads of Dornillieuse were

allowed to be present at such of the lessons as it was thought would be comprehended by them, while the children had a separate school provided. The young women alone were, as yet, without instruction; and Neff proposed that some of these should assemble in the evening in the room used as the children's school-room during the day, he himself, and one or two of his more advanced scholars, teaching *them*, while his assistant, Ferdinand Martin, practised the rest of the students in music. In this way twenty young women were put under instruction, several of whom appear to have made considerable progress.

The behaviour of these young students and the progress they had made in the winter were regarded by the Pastor with the deepest satisfaction. He says, that "out of the number he reckons, that seven or eight will be found qualified to discharge the duties of village catechists; that about as many more, though not taking upon them that office, will use the knowledge they have acquired for the highest purposes; while some, though less advanced, are ready to profit by future instruction." How far Neff's hopes were realised, it may be difficult to ascertain. We learn from the report of a missionary, of his own religious views, who visited the scenes of his past labours in 1834, that several of his pupils were exemplary in their lives, and filling situations of usefulness as teachers; some, on the other hand, had "apostatized;" but as that

term must be understood according to the views of him who uses it, it may, in many cases, only mean, that such individuals have adopted a less rigorous code of doctrine and practice than that which Neff would have prescribed or than may seem to ourselves just and expedient.

To return to the school.—On the return of spring, it became necessary for the winter academy to break up and disperse. To the poor inhabitants of Dormillieuse this was, indeed, a sorrowful event. The establishment of this colony had opened a new world, as it were to them, and they looked forward to the departure with extreme regret. On the evening before this was to take place the villagers made up a parting supper for their friends. One brought in his salted chamois, another his dried marmot, another his best bear's ham. The evening was passed in conversation, to which Neff added his farewell advice and prayers, and the next morning's sun saw them pursuing their way to their different homes, followed, no doubt, by many a kind look and prayer from the dwellers in the mountain. We may make question of matters concerning one another's faith, at other times and with other scenes before us; but *here* all differences are lost or forgotten. We only behold the Christian Pastor, the Guide, the Friend and Master, his winter's task successfully accomplished, dismissing his workmen to their several homes, there to practise and

improve upon what they had learnt. We feel how his heart must have gone with them, the children of his anxious care, through whom he hoped that other souls would be won to Christ's kingdom of love and peace. Can we not fancy him, the last, perhaps, to leave that barren rock on which they had rested through wintry snows and storms, lifting up his heart in gratitude for the measure of success which had attended him? Alas! his own valuable life was drawing to a close. But before we touch on its closing scenes, let us notice his account of the disbursements of this period, which may well excite our surprise. "Our expenses," says he, "for the adult school, including candles, ink and paper, the salary of my assistant master, and food for the sixteen or seventeen students who came from a distance, did not exceed 560 francs (about £22 10s.) for four months. Of this sum I can replace a little more than two-thirds, because some of the students have repaid their own share of the expense, and even the poorest furnished their quota of bread. We did not provide commons for those who belonged to Dormillieuse, because they boarded at home."

Whether from over exertion, and, generally, unwholesome food, or whether, as some say, from partaking, on one of his pastoral excursions, of some rice soup which had been left to stand in a copper vessel till it had contracted a

poisonous quality, Neff's health rapidly declined from this time. It is, at least, certain, that he complained of pains from the time of partaking of the food in question, and that he never was able, from that period, to bear solids, but frequently suffered those severe spasms which, in the following year, brought him to his end. Yet he passed through the summer of 1826 tolerably well, and another winter saw him again at Dormillieuse with his scholars; but this time he had to struggle against bodily indisposition and sufferings from a sprained knee, occasioned by a fall on the slippery rock. The internal complaint, however, was that which was bringing him low, and as soon as he had dismissed his scholars, in April 1827, he found it necessary to go to his native climate of Geneva, and seek relief from medical advice and the kind nursing of his mother. For a time he revived so much that prudence was forgotten, and he over-exerted himself, which brought on a severe relapse. Henceforth the disorder may be said to have been continually gaining upon him, until at length such excruciating pains were occasioned by the least attempt to take food, that he was content to suffer the severe pains of hunger rather than relieve them at so terrible a cost. To the last he retained his clearness of intellect, his steadfast faith, and his love for those who had so long been the objects of his care. He dictated letters of ex-

hortation and comfort to his churches, and two days before his death, traced with his own hands his farewell. Long and intense bodily suffering was sustained with a sweetness and patience worthy of the follower of Christ, and he breathed his last in the arms of some of his attached friends, on the 29th of April, 1829, aged 31.

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